

**Waging war can become a bad habit** Paul Robinson Ottawa Citizen 14 March 2011  
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(...) Amid calls to create a "no-fly zone" over Libya and lend military aid to the Libyan rebels, the idea of redemptive violence holds many in its sway. We ought to know better. In recent years we have seen more than enough evidence to convince rational people that waging war to make the world a better place most often does the opposite.

Maybe our intervention in Libya would save the rebels, oust Gadhafi, and institute peace, order and good government in short order. However, the U.S. director of national intelligence James Clapper told Congress last week that Gadhafi would probably win. Intervening on behalf of rebels who we think are bound to lose makes no strategic sense at all. Intervention would not bring about the victory of order over chaos, but instead would only make a bad situation even worse. (...)

(...) There is a natural tendency in war for the military and political goals to diverge -the aim of military action becomes more and more to gain an identifiable military victory rather than to achieve the political objective for which the war was supposedly started. We may start a war in order to fulfill some "responsibility to protect," but, as the bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999 showed, once we have started it, protecting people takes a back seat to beating the enemy. Humanitarian intervention ceases to be humanitarian the moment that the first bomb drops.

Torn between a desire to intervene and a fear of the consequences, in the case of Libya, we will all too likely resort to half-measures. A no-fly zone, in particular, seems particularly ill-suited to a conflict unfolding primarily on the ground. If the aim of the intervention is to remove Gadhafi, then force must be used in a manner which directly removes Gadhafi. Botched half-measures will merely ensure that the regime stays in power, but, like Iraq in the 1990s, becomes isolated by the world, subject to regular air strikes, and ground ever further into poverty and oppression. It is hard to see how that would benefit either the Libyan people or us. (...)

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